



Wednesday, 6 March
Hôtel de Lassay – Galerie des Fêtes

Opening of the Women Speakers' Summit by Ms. Yaël Braun-Pivet, President of the French National Assembly

Dear Madam President Bachelet,
Dear Women Speakers,
Dear women Vice Presidents of the French National Assembly,
Madam Chair of the Delegation for Women's Rights,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What a pleasure to see you all here together, what energy is radiating from all of us! This is an historic moment, since, **for the first time, the Women Speakers of Assemblies from all over the world are meeting at a summit in Paris.**

I would therefore like to begin by welcoming you and by saying how **proud I am to host you here**, in the French National Assembly, of which I am the first woman to preside over.

And I'm delighted to see that my case is not unique and that on every continent, women, indeed more and more women, are acceding to the high office of presiding over a parliamentary assembly, the repository of national sovereignty. **On a global scale a real revolution is underway - a revolution in equality that we embody.**

According to my information, ten of us are the first women to head our Assemblies: our colleagues from Belgium, Slovenia, Monaco, Angola, Madagascar, Mali, Indonesia, Kiribati and Bangladesh - who has just been re-elected!

I know some of you well, my European neighbours in particular, like Bärbel Bas with whom I co-chair the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly; Viktorija, whom I received just over a year ago in Paris; Markéta, who extended to us a very warm welcome at the 2nd Parliamentary Summit of the Crimean Platform in Prague last October; Éliane, Urška and Brigitte, whom I had the good fortune to meet in Dublin in September, on the sidelines of the PACE European Conference of Presidents of Parliament; Francine, for a first contact in Prague; and finally Nathalie, with whom we opened the XXXIIIrd session of the France-Quebec Inter-parliamentary Commission on 14 June in Paris.

In Côte d'Ivoire I was able to meet my counterparts from Madagascar, Christine, South Africa, Nosiviwe, Angola, Carolinja, and Rwanda, Donatille, when I had the honour of speaking at the opening of the Ivorian parliamentary session, which coincided with the meeting of the Presidents of the Africa section of the APF.

And finally today, for the first time, I am meeting the speakers from the American continent - Marcela for Mexico, Patricia for the Bahamas, Lanien for Saint-Christopher-and-Nieves, as well as those from Asia - Khuon Sudary for Cambodia, Puan Maharani for Indonesia, Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury for Bangladesh, who will join us very shortly - and even from Oceania with Tangariki Reete, for Kiribati!

It's also my first meeting with our colleague from Albania, Lindita, and several of her African counterparts: Catherine for Malawi, Esperança for Mozambique, Celmira for Sao Tome and Principe and Tulia Ackson for Tanzania, who is also President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union - and whom I congratulate on her election to that high office last October.

From the shores of the Pacific to the Bay of Bengal, from the snows of Quebec to the archipelagos of Indonesia, from the mountains of Albania to the islands of the Caribbean, you have come, from far and wide, some of you from very far away, to ensure that this unprecedented Summit takes place.

In the name of the French National Representation and on my own behalf, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The idea for such a summit came to me during an international trip, by plane, with my vice-president Valérie Rabault, who is here today and which I asked you to applaud. On our way back from a visit to Armenia, we were exchanging views on our **parliamentary diplomacy strategy, and it seemed to us that it absolutely had to include strong action in favour of women.** I then tested out with some of you my idea of taking the initiative of organising a Summit of Women Speakers of Assemblies shortly before International Women's Rights Day. There was definite interest and enthusiasm, so I sent a personal invitation to my 43 counterparts in the lower chambers, and the result was dazzling: **24 of you women speakers answered the call!**

In a short while, we'll be inaugurating together, an exhibition entitled "Aux urnes, citoyennes!" - "Women, go to the polls!" on the 80th anniversary of French women's right to vote. It will remind us of the long struggle to achieve political and social equality, in France as in the rest of the world.

But the fight is not over, it continues every day, in every country, and every time women's rights are denied or flouted, we must stand by their side. We know that young Afghan girls are now deprived of school and university, denied access to any position of responsibility. In Iran, despite the extraordinary courage of civil society, which has risen up against the domination of the mullahs, a strictly male power continues to claim to govern women's lives down to the smallest detail. Let us never forget that it was a single lock of hair protruding from a veil that led to Mahsa Amini's death, provoking an unprecedented movement of solidarity.

Although early marriages have fallen by 15% over the last ten years, they remain widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Worldwide, one in five women is married before the age of 18. An estimated 200 million women and girls are victims of genital mutilation, most before they reach their fifteenth year, as female circumcision is still practised in 31 countries.

Worldwide, one woman in three is a victim of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime and five women die every hour as a result of domestic violence. These intolerable figures concern us all. To combat them, we can draw inspiration from a number of models, such as Spain, which has led the way.

In some countries where women's rights had made considerable progress, they are now tending to regress under the pressure of conservative, repressive and liberty-destroying rhetoric.

In such a context, it was necessary and urgent that **we, the women speakers of assemblies, should come together to send out a strong political message: that of defending the values of equality and democracy throughout the world**, two days before International Women's Day, which we will be celebrating on Friday, each of us in our own countries.

As speakers of assemblies, we are influential women. Individually and collectively, we have a special responsibility to defend women's rights, to be the voice of their struggle for equality, **denouncing and condemning the barbaric acts of which they are victims, as was again the case during the terrible attacks on 7 October last.**

My thoughts also go out to the Ukrainian women who have been suffering for over two years from the appalling war waged by Russia.

The day before yesterday, when the two chambers of the French Parliament met in Congress, **France voted for the inclusion in the constitution of the voluntary interruption of pregnancy.** It is the very first country to do so. This is a guarantee for French women, but it is also, I can assure you, **a signal to all women throughout the world** a way of proclaiming universally that France recognises that every woman has the fundamental freedom to control her own body. At a time when anti-choice movements are making unprecedented headway and the right to abortion is tending to slip backwards in several major democratic countries, this inclusion in the constitution is a victory that I want to share with you.

In this respect, I would like to pay tribute to the Chair of the French National Assembly's Delegation for Women's Rights, Véronique Riotton, who next week, together with some twenty French parliamentarians appointed on a cross-party basis, will lead a sitting on the insertion in the constitution of the right to abortion, at the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

I am fully committed to this issue. From the very beginning of my presidency, symbolically, I inaugurated, close to here, **a bust of Simone Veil**, who led the vote to legalise abortion in France, almost fifty years ago. With Bärbel Bas, on the 60th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, we went together to lay a wreath in the colours of France and Germany, along with Simone Veil's two sons.

In my Assembly, 14 of the 22 members of the Bureau are now women; access to positions of responsibility is also a battle, and in December 2021, French M.P.s passed a bill to strengthen economic equality between women and men.

Indeed throughout all my international trips, **I have wanted to be a leader in the realm of feminist diplomacy**, so that no violation of women's rights be any longer tolerated.

In Poland, Ukraine, Armenia, and Côte d'Ivoire, where I travelled, I spoke with women citizens and compatriots committed to defending the rights of vulnerable people, particularly women and girls. I listened to them and made a commitment to take up their fight in France, out of solidarity, because their struggles are our responsibility.

This Summit of Women Speakers of Assemblies, which brings us together today, will enable us to go a step further. It gives us the opportunity **to set up a network.** Our priorities will be access to education and health, equality in the workplace, the fight against all forms of violence including that suffered by disabled women.

This Summit fits in fully, of course, with the numerous initiatives, which I welcome, within Francophonía, the Council of Europe, the Inter-parliamentary Union, or the Commonwealth. We are going to exchange ideas, establish contacts, and launch initiatives that will help our delegations and committees to work together to promote real equality between women and men.

Indeed, at the end of this summit, its round tables and its work, **we will publish an ambitious joint declaration**, with concrete proposals to match our commitment. Despite different situations, different legislation and customs, I am proud to see that together we can draw up a text that confirms our shared commitment and our unshakeable will to act, at all levels - national, regional and international - in order to advance the cause of women. The world will know that the Women Speakers of Assemblies are a force to be reckoned with!

In our work of reflection and conviction, **I am delighted to be able to count on the support of a great lady of parliamentary life: Nancy Pelosi**, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. She would have liked to have been here with us in person today, as she told me on her last visit to Paris, but the plenary sitting of the United States Congress prevents her from doing so, and we know that this sitting is crucial to the aid that needs to be given to Ukraine. Nevertheless, she wanted to add her voice to ours via a special video message which will be broadcast to us.

I would also like to welcome Michelle Bachelet, former President of the Republic of Chile, first woman President of UN Women and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Her career journey will certainly inspire us.

Finally, **I would like to welcome Oleksandra Matviichuk, Nobel Peace Prize 2022** for her work at the head of the NGO, the Centre for Civil Liberties. She is a tireless advocate of respect for the human person, and she has drawn the world's attention to the seriousness of the war crimes committed since the invasion of her country, Ukraine.

In a world where women pay a heavy price for war and confrontation, where the female body continues to undergo torture at the hands of hate-mongers, the tendency could be to sink into pessimism or fatalism. But this is not the case, and your presence here proves this. **We want to act and react**, to denounce the unacceptable, to sketch out the contours of a better world in which women play a leading role.

That is the primary ambition of this unprecedented summit, **because we Women Speakers of Assemblies have the political will to change the world**, just as we have changed attitudes in each of our respective countries.

In addition, I hope that at least one of you will volunteer to organise a similar summit in your assembly, next year.

A great female French novelist, George Sand, frequented this institution in the nineteenth century, as she was one of the first women to follow parliamentary debates. Her friends even urged her to run for parliament, but she did not dare do so, believing it to be premature. But George Sand, who believed in progress and education by example, had this magnificent phrase: *«The future can awaken more beautiful than the past»*.

Yes, thanks to us, through our joint and coordinated action, tomorrow can be better than today.

My dear counterparts and colleagues, it is therefore with great emotion that **I solemnly declare our Women Speakers' Summit open**.

Thank you so much.

